Civil Society Activism for Democracy and Peace-Building in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: In democracy and peace discourses activism of civil society organizations plays vital roles. Civil society organizations take intermediary roles between state and citizens in linking them for peaceful existence and democratic governance. Therefore, civil society activism is emphasized by many scholars and actors in post-colonial or post-conflict democratization process. A strong civil society can contribute to an affective state that can protect people's human rights, support economic development and tackle corruption, build peace and democratic governance. However, the role of civil society in newly emerged or developing democracies has always been questioned due to it inefficiency in making democracy success and keeping lasting societal peace. This research analyzes nature and the trends of civil society activism with regards to democratization and peace-building process in Sri Lanka. Finding of the study reveals that the civil society organizations are fragmented and weak in nature and their advocacy for democracy and peace-building process has always been challenged and criticized by the intense of ongoing violent ethnic conflict and civil war situation and the non-supportive conditions imposed by the government authorities in Sri Lanka. This study further identifies the necessity of rebuilding and strengthening civil society institutions advocating to promote and protect democratic governance and sustainable all inclusive peace in Sri Lanka. This study is descriptive and interpretive in nature and only the secondary data were used for the analysis.

Key words: Civil society, activism, democracy, peace-building, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

From the second half of the last century, civil society activism towards building democracy and peace at local and national levels in many countries has received global concerns of rulers, international actors and researcher. When democratic governance and peaceful existence of diverse population within states became challengeable due to intense of societal conflicts, malpractice in governance and violation of human and groups rights, the importance of independent civil voice-civil society activism in peace and democracy building has been increasingly stressed. It was identified and anticipated that civil society can provide popular support for building and promoting peace among polarized and competing forces and actively voice and take role in restoring democratic governance. This belief helped to multiple emergences of civil society organizations and their rules in public sphere. However, the civil society activism has not always been successful especially in peace and democracy building processes.

As a small and developing nation in global south, Sri Lanka has experienced prolong ethnic polarization and violent civil war which undermined and challenged the practice of democracy existence of peace in almost entire past colonial period. With the end of civil war in May 2009, Sri Lanka has now entered into a promising phase for building peace and democracy in the country. It was expected by many parties that the civil society activism will act an active role in the post-war transition process. Like many developing democracy in Sri Lanka too civil society activism has contributed to the shaping of society and polity towards peace and democratic governance. However, civil society activism in Sri Lanka has also been facing challenges and criticisms from different sources in its advocacy for peace and democracy-building processes. In this study, we draw attention to conceptualize civil society activism towards democracy and peace building with a specific focus on Sri Lankan context. Further, we attempt to examine the nature and trends of civil society activism towards peace and democracy building processes in Sri Lanka along with the

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conceptual overviews of civil society, democracy and peace-building. This study incorporates mainly the secondary data collected from different sources. The analysis of the data and the development of the arguments are descriptive and interpretive in nature.

CIVIL SOCIETY, DEMOCRACY AND PEACE-BUILDING: CONCEPTUAL VIEWS

Concept of civil society: Civil society and its institutions are playing a vital role in building societal peace and strengthening democracy and its institutions. In fact, they play as an intermediate between state and the citizen and link these two institutions for building peaceful environment and democratic governance. Therefore, the concept of civil society has emerged as popular one in democracy and peace building discourses. However, it is very difficult to define the concept 'civil society' because of the different viewpoints expressed by many. The term 'civil society' includes the multitude of associations, movements and groups where citizens organize to pursue shared objectives or common interests. These organizations functions beyond the individual or household level but below the state. In this way, civil society organizations include highly institutionalized groups such as religious organizations, trade unions, business association both international and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); local organizations such as community associations, farmer's associations, local sport clubs, cultural groups, business groups, credit societies, community media outlets and looser forms of associations such as social movements, academia, networks, virtual groups' and citizen groups outside national border such as diasporas.

There are number of overviews and surveys about the conceptual history and the different meanings of civil society. Each use carried with it, its own horizon of expectations where aspects and layers have pointed to future understandings. These conceptual changes occurred together with societal transformations. There are two different meaning to the concepts of 'civil society.' It can be understood to mean the forum in which specific interests are opposed and where groups and individuals engage in a permanent struggle which government is responsible for resolving. The second meaning of civil society is that it includes all the associations and groups of any type which are organized and exercise their functions independently of the state. Civil society, in the second sense, is a power that is built up from below and can resist and control the vertical power of government.

The typical catch-all definition of civil society is that it is the space between the state, the market and the family. In account of the emergence and importance of civil society, it has been seen as emanating either from the state or society. It has further been used as either a primarily political or a sociological concept (Anders, 2001). Some scholars are striving for neutral definition of civil society and others put for more or less explicitly normative definitions. However, though civil society, at least in the present state of social sciences, can not be precisely defined, it may be described. Edwards (2013) refer civil society as "all organizations and associations between the family and the state with the exception of businesses". According to Diamond (2015), civil society is "a realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state and bounded by a legal order or a set of shared rules". Above definitions indicates that civil society amounts to a positive-sum game where democratic culture is created as the unintended consequence of sound institutional setting. The distinguishing features of civil society are certain dimensions of organizations and their activities within the public sphere: it is concerned with public rather than private interests, it relates to state and it is pluralist (Anders, 2001). Therefore, in nature as Gellner (2009) indicates, civil society was 'civil' as opposed to 'military' in Americas (as well as in Bangladesh and Pakistan); it was of the people not the one party state like in Eastern Europe; it was independent of party bias or office-seeking in Asia; everywhere it was civilized in the sense that it stood for public and democratic negotiation of disagreement and the rule of law.

In Mouzelis (1998)'s view, a strong civil society entails the existence of rule-of-law conditions that effectively protect citizens from state arbitrariness; the existence of strongly organized non-state interest groups capable of checking eventual abuse of power by those control the means of administration and coercion; the existence of a balanced pluralism among civil society interests so that non can establish absolute domination. The importance of civil society is first and foremost directed at society to democratize political culture and by implication, rationality itself and to demarcate social space against both the state and the market forces, to uphold a sphere of political life for citizens. Civil society is the arena where democratic political culture is taking shape (Anders, 2001). Civil society has two main functions: precautionary against the state to balance, reconstruct and democratize it and advocating in order to expand liberty and equality. In the political arena, many civil society organizations such as advocacy groups and trade

unions have been prominent in challenging authoritarian rule and building peace and democracy at societal as well as national levels.

Concept of democracy: Democracy as the word itself indicates is the power of the people. In other words, democracy is the political regime which makes it possible for individuals holding different interests and beliefs to live under the same laws; it therefore enables us to live together with our differences. As Binsbergen (1995) rightly mentioned in the contemporary global discourse, 'democracy' has come to occupy an important place often carrying deep emotional significance in politics and international affairs. Since, it has acquired great mass mobilizing power, therefore, it has become a major export item of the super powers, international organizations, donors, actors and activists.

Villoro indicates that the term 'democracy' is used in various senses. At the very least, a distinction should be made between democracy as an ideal of political association and democracy as a system of government. The former is an objective of collective action and is a value in itself. The latter is a means of achieving certain common objectives and its value lies in the extent to which it contributes to their achievement. In the first sense, 'democracy' is the 'power of the people' where the 'people' is the totality of the members of an association. In this sense, democracy denotes an association in which all the members control collective decisions and their execution only having to obey themselves. In this form of community, there is no form of domination by a few persons over others. If everybody holds power, nobody is subject to anybody else. In its second meaning, 'democracy' denotes a series of rules and institutions which support a system of power. These include the equality of citizens before the law, civil rights, citizens' election of their leaders, the principle of needing a majority to take decisions and the separation sof powers (1998).

According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (1998), democracy is both an ideal to be pursued and a mode of government to be applied according to modalities which reflect the diversity of experiences and cultural particularities without derogating from internationally recognized principles, norms and standards. It is, thus, a constantly perfected and always perfectible state or condition whose progress will depend upon a variety of political, social, economic and cultural factors. As, an ideal democracy aims essentially to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual to achieve social justice, foster the economic and social development of the community, strengthen the cohesion of society and enhance national tranquility as well as to create a climate that is favorable for international peace. As a form of government, democracy is the best way of achieving the above objectives, it is also the only political system that has the capacity for self-correction.

Democracy is a number of things at the same time, so that the term democratization as the process of bringing about or enhancing democracy may refer to distinct and quite different phenomena. Philosophically, democracy within the collectivity of human beings denotes the source of the legitimate exercise of power through legal and political institutions. That source is not a supernatural being, a king, an aristocracy, a specific gender or age group, a priestly caste, a revealed unchangeable text or shrine but 'the people' (Binsbergen, 1995). Following amounts to a comprehensive political culture of democracy in any society:

- Active participation in political parties organized on a mass basis. A state of democracy ensures that the processes by which power is acceded to wielded and alternates allow for free political competition and are the product of open, free and nondiscriminatory participation by the people exercised in accordance with the rule of law
- Careful and equitable practice of rule of law. Democracy is founded on the primacy of the law and the exercise of human rights. In a democratic state, no one is above the law and all are equal before the law
- The development both in a formal bureaucratic form and through networks of lobbying, canvassing and opinion-making of transparent links between the realms of direct participation at the grassroots level and the national political center
- Direct personal accessibility of those in power through networks of patronage, nepotism, regionalism, ethnicity and co-religionism
- The existence of an open and general political discussion in the wider society, furthered by the overall accessibility of the written and electronic media, freedom of the press, widespread literacy and a level of affluence enabling people access to the media
- Peace and economic, social and cultural development are both conditions for and fruits of democracy therefore, the democracy should ensure the existence and protection of peace at different levels and should enhance and empower development process. In fact, there is, thus, interdependence between peace, development and democracy

Touraine in 1998 has identified three basic conditions for the existence of practical democracy. The first is restriction of the power of the state. The second is the existence of representable social actors having some awareness of their common interests. The third is the awareness of citizenship which leads to recognition of polity and its representative institutions which are strictly political that it to say, they are not identical with the expression of social or economic interests.

Concept of peace-building: The concept 'peace-building' is relatively new one to the academic discourse but the history reveals that the in many societies, there were more advocacy and fighting for building peace at societal and national levels. The term 'peace-building' came into widespread use in public sphere after 1992 when Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then United Nations Secretary-General, announced his 'An Agenda for Peace' to promote and enhance global peace in the twenty first century world. Since then, peace-building has become a broadly used concept encompassing multiple (and at times contradictory) perspectives and agendas but often ill-defined term connoting activities that go beyond crisis intervention such as longer-term development and building of governance structures and institutions. Therefore, the concept 'peace-building' is indiscriminately used to refer to preventive diplomacy, preventive development, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

Peace-building tasks include the civil and military management of conflict causes and effects at the social, economic and political levels in order to create the conditions necessary for a sustainable peace in war-torn societies (Paris, 2004). Also, it involves a full range of approaches, processes and stages needed for transformation toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships and democratic governance modes and structures. An Agenda for Peace in 1992 identified the main components of peace-building as follows: peacemaking and peace-keeping operations to be truly successful must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people. Through agreements ending civil strife, these may include disarming the previously warring parties and the restoration of order, the custody and possible destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, monitoring elections, advancing efforts to protect human rights, reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.

Peace-building aims at preventing and managing armed conflict and sustaining peace after large-scale organized violence has ended. Therefore, peace-building process should ideally create conducive conditions for economic reconstruction, development and democratization which are understood as preconditions for legitimate democratic order. Galtung (1975) a pinion in conflict and peace studies defines peace-building as the process of creating self-supporting structures that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur.

In a post-war or post-conflict context, peace-building assumes that the creation of something that is more than just the absence of war, namely the establishment of a positive or sustainable peace through the transformation of structural and cultural violence helps prevent the resurgence of violence and the outbreak of future conflicts. Also, peace-building signifies the creation of a socio-political structure which is able to prevent the outbreak of conflict or relapse into conflict and to perpetuate peace (Shinoda, 2002). Peace-building aims to create the conditions necessary for a sustainable peace in war-torn societies and attempts 'to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict'.

According to Newman *et al.* (2009), the components and objectives of peace-building cannot be easily described because this is subject to debate and disagreement. However, they give a broad definition as following:

- Preventing the resumption or escalation of violent conflict in conflict-prone societies and establishing a durable and self-sustaining peace
- Addressing the underlying sources of conflict building or rebuilding peaceful social institutions and values including respect for human rights
- Building or rebuilding institutions of governance and the rule of law

Because of the scope and breadth of peace-building activities and the emphasis on building institutions based upon market economics and democracy in contemporary context, peace-building is often described as 'liberal peace-building'. The theoretical underpinning of liberal peace-building is the liberal peace: the idea that certain kinds of (liberally constituted) societies will tend to be more peaceful both in their domestic affairs and in their international relations, than illiberal states are (Newman *et al.*, 2009).

DIFFERENT ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN BUILDING DEMOCRACY AND PEACE

It is identified that the existence of an active civil society is an essential element for building democracy and peace in any society. In general, civil society can contribute to democracy in four central ways: it counters state power; it facilitates political participation by helping in the aggregation and representation of interests, it serves as a political arena that could play an important role in the development of some of the necessary attributes for democratic development and more broadly, it plays an important role in furthering struggles for citizenship rights (Jamal, 2012). The role of civil society is particularly important in processes of transition to democracy from authoritarian regimes. Its decisive impact was illustrated in the civil revolutions which led to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes in many Eastern European countries and it is still showing its growing strength in many developing. Civil society organizations play vital roles at local, national, regional and global levels in the promotion of democratization and inclusive governance, i.e., governance characterized by the principles of participation, access, equity, subsidiarity and the rule of law. As Cheema indicates, at the local level, civil society organizations are actively engaging in community development, skill improvements for sustainable livelihoods and access to basic social services. In urban areas, they play major roles in providing urban shelter, services and protecting the interests of slum dwellers and squatters in government initiated programs. They organize poor urban communities to help them gain access to land titles and basic urban services such as water, sanitation, primary healthcare and education. At the national level, they often perform a watchdog function to improve the quality of governmental functions including electoral and parliamentary process. Also, they work for public interest law reform, enhance access of the poor to justice through paralegal services, undertae advocacy and seek the accountability of public officials by informing media about violations by public officials.

Civil society organizations and their networks are important players in national political life to strengthen governance and transform state-society relations for cooperative and cohesive existence. They link citizens with the parts of state machinery through formal and informal bridging mechanisms as well as bonding citizens to each others. They can make a significant difference in improving governance-as innovators in service provision, developer of pro-poor policies, investigators of state abuse, monitors and overseers of state institutions and advocates with and for poor people. A strong civil society contribute to an affective state that can protect people's human rights, support economic growth, tackle corruption and provide security and basic services like education and health care. Effective civil society organizations can also complement, inform, influence or challenge the state a role often referred to as the 'demand side of the government'. Pressing for better public service, pushing political leader to improve the performance of the state, identifying who does and does not benefit from the public spending, lobbying for the rights of excluded groups such as disable people, lobbying for land rights, campaigning against corruption, offering solidarity networks, engaging in public-private partnership or delivering public services are some of the major roles that civil society activism focusing on democracy-building process.

Furthermore, in war-to-peace transitions civil society plays a critical role in promoting peace agreements and complimenting the work of domestic institutions. Civil society institutions and actors contribute to the delivery of humanitarian relief, support the reintegration of former combatants, facilitate refugee return, improve the performance of political and economic institutions and cultivate greater trust between different parties through civic engagement (Jamal, 2012). Hiroshi (2007) identifies the civil society activism is important in peace-building from below. Peace-building from below may be broadly defined as practice by non-state actors utilizing various resources, to create amicable relationship with national, ethnic, radical, religious or political others to build a social structure which is able to promote a sustainable peace.

In different ways, civil society organizations have been advocating for building and enhancing peace and democracy in post-war and post-conflict societies. Civil society groups advocated for the inclusion of relevant issues into peace agreements such as land reform in Guatemala, human rights provisions in Northern Ireland or legal issues aimed at the recognition or implementation of rights of marginalized groups such as the Mayas in Guatemala, Kurdish minorities in Turkey and Muslims in Sri Lanka. Civil society also advocated for issues related to the implementation of peace agreements such as the return of refugees in Bosnia or the establishment of truth finding and reconciliation commissions.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM IN NEW DEMOCRACIES

Civil society role or activism in promoting democracy and peace differ region to region and country to country.

In political transition, civil society has taken different roles towards strengthening democracy and building peace in different periods in different regions of the world. In most Latin American states, a highly diversity of civil society groups and organizations played important roles mainly in the fight against military dictatorship and in the recovery of democratic governance at the end of 1960s (Spurk, 2010). On the other hand, due to the impose of colonial rule, there was no room for civil society activism in Africa. However, during and post-transition process in many African countries civil society organizations played vital roles especially in restoring democracy and peace. Similarly, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, civil society in South East Asia gradually organized in opposition to colonial and repressive regimes. In Indonesia, civil society organizations played vital roles in its complete transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The evolution and growth of civil society in Malaysia reflected social and political changes in the country. However, Malaysia is a prime example of a country with a detailed legal mechanism for the organization of civil society that provides many avenues for state surveillance and control over the independence of civil society functioning. There are multiple forms of civil society in India and Bangladesh which are largely shaped by community needs and government space for action. Over the past year, there has been a dramatic increase in the role of civil society in the democratic governance process. In Bangladesh, civil society engagement has led to the resignation of the military-led government and to alter it with elected government in many occasions and to restore the functioning of democratic institutions.

In comparison to other regions, the role and activities of civil society organizations in Asia were traditionally more circumscribed as governments had taken active role in the promotion of economic development while limiting the ability of these organizations to form and participate in governance. These conditions changed during the course of the 1990s which laid the foundation for the increased growth of civil society organizations within the region. There is limited space for civil society in China due to unemployment of millions of working force and lack of state's role in providing social welfare. In fact as Berglund (2009) indicates the development of civil society in the rest of the world has not followed the same pattern as developed simultaneously with states in Western Europe.

But, there are negative experiences civil society roles in building and promoting democracy and peace in many late developing countries. Not only does the state in late-developing societies curry a negative legacy but their post-independence trajectories have further consolidated the pre-independence despotic features. It is not surprising that the majority of civil society organizations operate not so much as safeguards against the state despotism than as administrative extensions of the state's highly corrupt and particularistic apparatuses. This is true for instance of various working-class organizations (such as trade unions) which in contrast to the Western case were not constituted in opposition to the state but created the state elites themselves with a view to cementing their control of the means of domination over public (Mouzelis, 1998).

There are some successful stories on the role of civil society organizations in peace and democracy building process in developing countries, especially countries in transforming of totalitarian regimes to people democracy in Eastern Europe and in post-apartheid regimes in South Africa. But in most of the other new democracies in the third world as many researches indicate, the civil society activism in peace-building and democratization process was weak and also fragmented in nature.

The strength of civil society differs greatly in different regions of the Third World. In Africa for example, civil society is 'male dominated and gerontocratic' in nature and includes ethnic and fundamentalist religious associations unlikely to sponsor democratization (Smith, 2003). Domestically, enfeebled and coopted civil society lacks the capacity and space to present realistic alternatives for a peaceful solution while various international peace-making attempts have failed, reducing the appetite for further external intervention in many African countries. It is obvious in most part of the Asia too. In Latin America, while there has been some collective empowerment through credit unions, self-help housing and other community initiatives, new social movements sometimes have been subjected to 'capture' by government and clientelist politics. Therefore, the applicability of the concept 'civil society' in a third world context has been heavily criticized as arguments against the universal applicability of a concept developed within western political philosophy have been raised.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM IN SRI LANKA: ORIGIN, NATURE AND ITS ROLES IN PEACE AND DEMOCRACY BUILDING PROCESSES

One of the small nation in the world, Sri Lanka, yet one that held much promise when it received constitutional independence in 1948. In it too, civil society had been playing an intermediate role between the state and the public in fulfilling the legitimate demands,

interests of citizens and making governance democratic one. As Uyangoda indicates the notion 'public sphere' is important in modern political theory of democracy. It denotes the existence of a domain of social life in which citizens' political activity takes pace outside the sphere of state. It also refers to the space where public discussions and deliberations take place where, allowing the formation of what is known as public opinion. According to him, this political sphere emerged in colonial Sri Lanka through organized associations of citizens. The Buddhist movement of Anagariya Dharmapala made a key contribution on this regard. He was the first 'national' activist of civil society to introduce a form of associational politics autonomous in colonial Sri Lanka. Thereafter, numbers of civil society organizations emerged on the basis of religion, caste, profession, interest, etc. (Uyangoda, 2001).

In Sri Lanka, the campaign for a citizen-based order of political modernity was to be spearheaded by a host of civil society bodies that included trade unions, youth associations, women's clubs, rural based Mahajana Sabhas (people's society) and marginalized caste associations. Indeed the late 1920s were a period in which Sri Lanka's civil society in all ethnic formations developed a measure of activism and vibrancy unmatched during any proceeding period (Uyangoda, 2001). They spread democratic political awakening across the society and demanded the colonial rulers for constitutional reforms assuring universal adult franchise, ethnic equality and independence. To some extend they represented the social and political margins (Wickramasinghe, 2001). In this process, many of the civil society organizations were with Left political parties. However, from the partnership with government in the 1960 and 1970s, the lefts not only at politics but also at civil society spheres became lost their identity. From 1970s onward, the number of civil society organizations increased especially with regard to protect human rights and voiced for societal and economic equity. The first civil society group to specialize in human rights, the civil rights movement was formed in 1971 in response to the JVP insurrection and its aftermaths (Orjuela, 2004). In Sri Lanka, the relationship between the state and civil society changed with the formation of development NGOs around 1970s. Development and political related issues such as human rights, women's rights, the creation of social and political awareness in the quest for employment and income began to be pursued by NGOs in an organized manner after 1974 (Paul, 2004).

The electoral victory of the right-wing, pro-liberalist United National Party (UNP) in 1977 general elections and the authoritarian Presidential system of governance, it introduced the intense of radical ethnic and nationalist insurgencies in the eighties led number of NGOs and leftist groups to occupy the public domain and political-intellectual spheres through debate, discussion, agitation, research and publication. In the context where the left and the oppositionist political parties were in retreat and in decline, other kind of civil society institutions provided a space for solidarity, collaboration, intervention and political action (Uyangoda, 2001). The new constitution introduced by the UNP government in 1978 recognizes the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and freedom to form and join a trade union (Article 14(1) a-d of the constitution; Parliament Secretariat in 2011. However, it was evident in Sri Lanka that during regime in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, a strongest trade union called Jathika Sevaya Sangama (JSS) was fully support for the authoritarian rule of UNP and it was behind the most incidents which contributed for ethnic conflict and violence, specially held in 1981 in Jaffna and in July 1983 July in many part of Sri Lanka. With the emergence of civil war and the decline of democratic governance many civil society organizations, especially, NGOs have been working toward the development and social justice in different ways in Sri Lanka but they always receive criticisms and oppositions from the nationalists and state officials because of their affiliations with International NGOs international aid agencies which are spreading western imperialism and working for Tamils' nationalism.

With the hit by Asian Tsunami in 2004 waves and their devastations, tremendous developments and activism of the civil society organization were obvious in Sri Lanka. There were number of civil society organizations, especially community-based organizations and NGOs emerged and worked toward infra-structural development, livelihood supports and building inter-communal harmony in Tsunami devastated areas. However, their activities were questioned greatly as always depending on donor or big bosses. Furthermore, government also tries to control their activities. Even though, they helped to the recovery of lives and livelihoods of poor people but their functions were criticized mainly for imposing Western thoughts, culture and lifestyle and for undermining the local cultural and religious identities and practices. This caused to challenge and threaten the security of the INGOs operating in the conflict and disaster affected areas. The killing of 17 French based Humanitarian Organization in Mutur in the Eastern province while involving in Tsunami rehabilitation works was a clear example to the thread over civil society organizations in Sri Lanka. However, it is

unchallengeable fact that the active roles played by the civil society organizations have greatly helped to the recovery, resettlement and relief activities in Tsunami hit areas which also induced development and societal harmony in those areas.

Apart from working on conflict zone, many civil society organizations have been working for the promotion of democracy and good governance in different ways. Center for Policy Alternative, Peoples Action for Free and Fair Election (PAFFREL), Free Media Movement Sri Lanka are prominent among those. They are working on election monitoring, human rights protection, anti-corruption and media independence. However, their activism to control electoral violence, malpractices in elections, killing of journalists and independence of media were also challenged due to the state control over media and elections. Accept few elections in the recent past, most of the elections held in Sri Lanka after the intense of civil war were criticized by election monitors and international actors.

Civil society organizations have also played vital roles in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict resolution process. A powerful civil society can contribute in many ways in a conflict resolution process. Orjuela identify 3 major peace work function of civil society: put pressure on key actors, build support for peace and poster peaceful relations among other peoples and work as an intermediary between key actors and ordinary people (Orjuela, 2004) and Liyanage add one more function as develop early warning system and early interventions (Liyanage, 2006). In this way, civil society provides the opportunity for building trust among different groups in society. In developing democracies which have multi-ethnic population and face complex inter-ethnic socio-political situations, civil society is able to play an important role by calling into action the pressure of trust.

Like in many developing countries when the civil war started to make tremendous impacts over the civilian lives in Sri Lanka, many civil society organizations especially NGO and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) emerged and have been focusing on peace-building functions such as conflict transformation, settlement of conflict and war victims, monitoring peace agreement and post-agreement settlements. Citizen Committee for National Harmony (1977), Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (1979), Jaffna Citizen's Committee (1981), Mother's Front (1984), The University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna (UTHR-J) (1988), National Peace Council (1995), Center for Peace Building and Reconciliation (2003), Foundation for Co-Existence were some among the prominent civil society-based peace movements. In the later part of ethnic conflict and

civil war, many undergraduate associations have also played a vital role in mobilizing public and expressing their national demands to recognize their self-determination, protect rights, equal share in the peace process. The 'Ponku Tamil' events organized by Tamil undergraduates and 'Oluvil Declaration' made by 'Muslim undergraduates' are the major effective events in mobilizing people to peace after the Ceasefire Agreement reached in Sri Lanka in 2002 (The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which was signed between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eealam (LTTE) in early February 2002 paved ways for liberal peace-building process in Sri Lanka and was viewed by many as a new phase in Sri Lankan ethnic conflict targeting on ending civil war and finding lasting solution to ethnic conflict. The MoU not only stopped the fighting in the war zones but also attempted to bring normalcy in the war-toned Sri Lanka. There were six rounds of peace talks from 2002-2006 facilitated by the Norwegian peace brokers. During this period, civil society organizations have also actively involved. In the peace-building process including the empowerment of public towards peace and democracy. During peace talks, number of civil society organizations was able to mobilized public towards popularizing their issues and demands and claiming their rights and right to participate in peace talks. 'Pongu Tamil' events were organized by Tamil undergraduates of Jaffna and Eastern universities in Tamils predominant areas in the North-East and the 'Oluvil Declaration' was made by the Muslim undergraduates of South Eastern University in front of university. Both kinds of events advocated the rights of self-determination and the self-rule of Tamils and Muslims in the North-East, claimed by both as their transitional homeland. Also, the events justified and voiced for the representation of their ethnic groups leaders in the negotiation process, especially in the peace talks. For further details on the above events (Yusoff *et al.*, 2014; Sarjoon, 2011) and Premise.

However, the effectiveness of the civil society activism towards promoting democracy and peace in Sri Lanka was always being questioned and challenged. Civil society organizations through their collective activism failed to stop the continuation of war, cost of war, decline of economy and most importantly decline of parliament democracy. They were not successful even in building peace and harmony among communities and influence policy makers, parliamentarians and most importantly politicians who have been causing for all political conflicts within society. As Liyanage (2006) indicated one of the general flaws of civil society activities in Sri Lanka is that their work is invariably

targeted at the same groups. Many civil society organizations have failed to address new issues and problems and continue to work within an old framework. NGOs and peace activists have failed miserably to produce a significant impact on the peace process and have become subservient partner of donor agencies. Infect, citizens have the legitimate power to control and monitor what government do and failed to do. But in Sri Lankan context, it has been challenged by impact of the intense civil war and authoritarian control of government machinery over public domain.

At the end of civil war in 2009, since Sri Lanka has a large civil society represented by organizations of all types, it was expected that the post-war environment would present opportunities for civil society an active role for political change, economic development and building lasting peace in the country. However, the Sri Lankan Government created a challenging and restrictive environment for civil society organizations especially operating in the former war zones of the North-Eastern region. Therefore, it was identified by many that the post-civil war period in Sri Lanka had been a critical period for civil society activism. With the military victory over the terrorist reactions of Tamils separatists, the UPFA government with its overwhelming public support attempted to sabotage the democratic governance system of the country in number of ways. From 2009 up to 2015, Sri Lanka polity turned to an Authoritarian and Nepotism Model. In this process, government expanded its control over all sphere of public life. Indeed, the behavior of the state is also significant to limiting the potential capacity of civil society in voicing for and taking role in promoting and protecting democracy and peace in a country. As many criticized, the Sri Lankan government during the above period was very much oppressive of independent civil society activism which led the state apparatus to be dominated the affective functioning of civil society to a great extent. As Global Civil Society Alliance in 2014 indicates, despite official rhetoric that the end of the civil war in 2009 ushered in a new era of democracy where constitutional rights are respected, democratic dissent remains severely imperiled in Sri Lanka.

The legal basis for the formation of civil society organizations and the legal framework in which they functions is perhaps the key dynamic between state and civil society. But, in the post-war Sri Lankan context, government imposed number of legal and other kind of limitations and pressures on civil society organizations which led to the limits of their activism and existence. Government authorities created severe regulatory environment and major disincentives for registration. Further, government exercised several kinds of restraint on civil society organizations which made the legal and political environment unfavorable for the flourishing of independent civil society activism. At extreme level, government intensified its control over the independent activities of the NGOs. On 1 July 2014, the National Secretariat for NGOs which operated under the Ministry of Defense and Urban Development issued a circular calling on NGOs to desist from conducting press conferences, workshops, trainings for journalists and dissemination of press releases.' Indicative of Sri Lankan authorities intolerance of dissent, these activities of the government has regarded as 'unauthorized' and 'beyond the mandate' of NGOs. Furthermore, in another recent worrying development in July the 2014, the NGO secretariat announced that it was investigating three NGOs for failing to comply with legal provisions but did not reveal the identities of the organizations it sought to target. In criticizing the government action, Global Civil Society Alliance, CIVICUS (2014), worried that 'with the political opposition effectively marginalized in Sri Lanka, civil society is thus the only alternative source of objective analysis of government policies and practices. But activists and independent civil society organizations are being targeted on an unprecedented scale'. Similarly, some other international organizations were also concerned and commented on the government's intimidation of civil society in Sri Lanka. Transparency International (2014) in its statement indicated that 'the threatening to silence the voices of people is a threatening to democracy'. United States Department of State also expressed its concern over the intensifying pressure on Sri Lankan civil society and continued to pursue resolutions on Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council over the issues. It is the challenge on civil society activism in the post-war Sri Lankan context was very much criticized and received the concerns of many international authorities, organizations and actors. The regime change at the end of 2015 has created a hope and horizon for building peace and democracy in Sri Lanka where civil society activism is also reenergizing.

CONCLUSION

Civil society and its organizations are important in linking people with state and controlling state power. They are playing vital roles in building and strengthening democracy and its institutions and promoting peaceful environment. Even though, civil society activism has played vital role in shaping and developing the society and polity, however, its role in most developing democracies has been questioned because of its internal weaknesses and ineffectiveness in advocating the issues regarding peace and democracy building.

Like in many developing democracy, emergence and activism of civil society organizations was evident even during colonial period. They have also played vital roles

in voicing and advocating rights and interests of different groups of people and strengthening peace and democracy in the post-independent period too. Introduction of liberal economy and the emergence of ethnic conflict from the beginning of 1980s allowed the emergence of number of new civil society organizations and their activism over the impact of new liberalism and civil war at societal and national level. However, they became to face number of challenges and issues due to the impact of intense civil war and authoritarian nature of governance. It was predicted by many peace and democracy activists that the end of civil war in 2009 would pay ways for independent civil society activism which would ensure building peace and strengthening democracy in war affected Sri Lanka but unfortunately, civil war end has caused to the reemergence of and predominance of majoritarian (Sinhalese) ethno-nationalism at societal and political level which not only attempted to establish a Sinhalese Raj (State) but also opposed any kind of Foreign involvement in post-war transformation process in Sri Lanka which in turn negatively influenced on the civil society activism too. Since, majority of the civil society organizations have been considerably depend on INGOs and international funding agencies for their activism and ethno-nationalism was also highly supported and funded by government authorities, civil society institutions were further challenged by the rigid rules and regulations imposed by the government authorities. In Sri Lankan post-war context, the democratic politics is covered by the ethno-nationalist hegemony and military radicalism under this model organized civil activism cannot function as counter hegemonic players.

On the other hand, in a social formation in which money and power are dominant, civil society, its institutions and discourse are influenced heavily by the state and economy. It is obvious in contemporary social democracy of Sri Lanka. The entire civil society is dominated by power and money. In the new hegemonic order of neo-liberalism, majoritarian ethno-nationalism and economic globalization, the organized labor or trade unions are not present as counter-hegemonic players. What is the main reason for the weakness position of civil society in Sri Lanka is that the failure to build an integrated strong civil society. Infect in contemporary Sri Lanka, civil society organizations are highly fragmented in nature and deeply controlled by state power and donors. This context will hardly allow civil society to be independent and take an intermediate role between state and public which is important for building peace and democracy.

However, the regime shift in the end of 2015 has produced a climate to forecast the new avenue for civil society activism toward fighting for and assurance of strengthening good democratic governance and building lasting peace in Sri Lanka. The new government has been taking number of initiative to rebuilding civil institutions in order to monitor the progress of democracy and peace-building. The new regime which came to power with people mandate for ensuring democratic governance and sustainable peace in Sri Lanka should respect democratic dissent and create an enabling environment for civil society activism in line with constitutional and international law standards. A coherent policy reform and operational measures in line with international norms and standards to integrate and empower the civil society organizations are the immediate need of the time.

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